

Message Text

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44

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 CU-04 AID-05 PC-05 OMB-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 SY-05 /087 W

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P R 052244Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3878

INFO AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

UNCLAS BOGOTA 2453

EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PINS, CO

SUBJ: STUDENT DISTUBANCES IN MEDELLIN

REF: BOGOTA 3873

1. TWO-MONTH LONG UNIVERSITY STUDENT UNREST IN MEDELLIN FLARED INTO RIOTING ON MARCH 4 AND RESULTED IN THE DEATH OF ONE STUDENT, SERIOUS INJURIES TO THREE OTHERS, 12 MEMBERS OF SECURITY FORCES INJURED (ONE WITH BAD ACID BURNS), 3 VEHICLES BURNED AND 99 DEMOSTRATORS DETAINED.

2. ACCORDING TO MEDELLIN AUTHORITIES, DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURIES OF STUDENTS OCCURRED WHEN SMALL ARMY PATROL WAS ISOLATED AND ATTACKED WITH MOLOTOV COCKTAIL, ROCKS, AND BOTTLES OF ACID. WHEN STUDENTS ATTEMPTED TO CLOSE WITH SOLDIERS AND GRAB THEIR WEAPONS, SOLDIERES LOADED WEAPONS AND OPENED FIRE. BODY OF STUDENT VICTIM WAS FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM MEDELLIN POLICLINICA BY PRESUMED STUDENT COMPANIONS EVENING, MARCH 4, AND TAKEN TO UNIVERSITY OF ANTIOQUIA (UOA). AUTHORITIES INFORM THEY BELIEVE STUDENT WAS BURIED AT 5:00 A.M. MARCH 5 IN SIMPLE CEREMONY AGREED TO BY PARENTS.

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3. REACTION OF MEDELLIN AUTHORITIES HAS BEEN STRONG AND UNAPOLOGETIC. TROOPS ENTERED UOA CAMPUS FOR FIRST TIME DURING CURRENT DEMONSTRATIONS TO SEARCH FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND THEN WITHDREW. CITY'S PUBLIC ORDER COUNCIL (COMPOSED OF TOP CIVILIAN AND SECURITY FORCE LEADERSHIP): (1) WARNED THAT THEY WOULD TAKE WHATEVER MEASURES ARE NECESSARY TO RESTORE TRANQUILITY; (2) JUSTIFIED SOLDIERS' REACTION IN FACE OF "BRUTAL EXTREMIST ATTACK"; AND (3) INDICATED THAT DECISION TO OCCUPY AND CLOSE UOA IN THE HANDS OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ.

4. SECURITY FORCES IN MEDELLIN ARE BRACED FOR POSSIBLE FURTHER VIOLENCE MARCH 5, WITH HEAVY POLICE AND MILITARY PATROLS ON THE STREETS SINCE EARLY A. M.

5. IN BOGOTA SITUATION AT UNIVERSITIES HAS BEEN QUIET SINCE DISORDERS ON MARCH 2 WHEN CLASHES BETWEEN STUDENTS AND SECURITY FORCES PRODUCED SEVERAL INJURIES, SOME 40 ARRESTS, AND 3 VEHICLES BURNED. GIVEN THE ALREADY VOLATILE SITUATION ON MANY COLOMBIAN CAMPUSES, THE MARCH 4 EVENTS IN MEDELLIN, ESPECIALLY THE DEATH OF A STUDENT, MAY CAUSE PROTEST DEMONSTRATION IN BOGOTA AND ELSEWHERE.

6. THE IMMEDIATE STATED CAUSES FOR THE PRESENT UNREST ARE STUDENT-FACULTY GRIEVANCES OVER A WIDE VARIETY OF UNIVERSITY PROBLEMS. HOWEVER, EXTREME CAMPUS ELEMENTS WILL TRY TO EXPLOIT DISCONTENT IN ORDER TO INTENSIFY THE DISORDER.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS, CIVIL DISORDERS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976BOGOTA02453
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760087-0379
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760392/aaaaddas.tel
Line Count: 90
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BOGOTA 3873
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2004 by fisherem>; APPROVED <14 DEC 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN MEDELLIN
TAGS: PINS, CO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006